

**Frontier CASF Broadband Infrastructure Grant Application – Lake Isabella/Weldon FTTP
Item #1 - Project Summary**

REVISED 7/26/21

Applicant: Frontier California, Inc. (U-1002-C)

Contact: Amy Warshauer
Manager, Government & External Affairs
Amy.warshauer@ftr.com

Project Title: Lake Isabella/Weldon FTTP Project

Location: Lake Isabella and Weldon within Kern County

Type: Middle-Mile / Last Mile

Grant Request: \$9,431,731.43 (100% Funding Requested)

PROJECT SUMMARY

Frontier California, Inc. (U-1002-C) (Frontier) is applying for a \$9,431,731.43 grant from the California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) Broadband Infrastructure Grant Account to deploy middle and last mile fiber to the premises (FTTP) facilities that will provide HSI (HSI) to 175 unserved CASF-eligible households in the regions of Lake Isabella and Weldon within Kern County. Frontier refers to the collective areas of this proposal as the Lake Isabella and Weldon Middle-mile/FTTP Project (Project). Frontier requests that the California Public Utilities Commission (Commission) grant full funding for this Project in the amount of \$9,431,731.43

The Project offer service to customers with minimum symmetrical speeds of 50 Mbps and maximum symmetrical speeds of up to 1 Gbps using fiber optic technology. The Project covers approximately 1. square miles in the Lake Isabella wire center and 5.2 square miles in the Weldon wire center. Infrastructure deployment would include 92 miles of fiber, five fiber distribution cabinets and upgrades to the equipment at the Lake Isabella and Weldon central office locations. Major equipment expenses include packet switching equipment, but are not limited to fiber, fiber terminals and distribution hubs, optical line terminals, and Packet Optical Networking. Frontier will leverage its existing middle-mile network as well as the new middle-mile network to be completed from the Project build. Fiber will be place in existing conduit or on existing poles, where applicable. Where conduit or poles do not exist, fiber will be placed in existing easement and/or right of way following existing copper facility paths. It is estimated that this Project will be approximately 64% aerial and 36% buried installation in Lake Isabella and 5% aerial and 95% buried in the Weldon Wire Centers.

The estimated construction timeline, after all permits are secured, is within the two-year window as required by D.18-12-018. Due to the rugged terrain, remote location and need to underground, Frontier does not anticipate this Project would be exempt from CEQA, and therefore, would not qualify for ministerial review.

FUNDING RATIONALE

Under the new CASF rules adopted in D.18-12-018 (issued December 20, 2018) (Decision), Frontier believes that the proposed Project qualifies for 100% funding – \$9,431,731.43 – which represents the full Projected costs to provide service to 175 unserved CASF-eligible households.

The Decision provides a table which summarizes criteria for funding level determinations. According to this table, only Projects in low-income areas or without any service from an existing facilities-based provider (a “dial-up only” area) are eligible to receive up to 100% funding. According to the California Interactive Broadband Map, all census blocks are unserved and eligible for CASF funding. The Project qualifies for 100% funding as it meets the following criteria:

Criteria	Reimbursement
Baseline for Eligible Project	60%
Presence of dial-up only (all households)	40%
TOTAL	100%

- **Areas with only dial-up or no Internet connectivity:** There is currently no broadband infrastructure within the Weldon wire center area. Frontier has existing infrastructure providing 3M/768K Internet service in Lake Isabella.
- **Existence of communication facilities that may be upgraded to deploy broadband:** The Commission interprets this category mean that the proposed Project relies primarily on existing infrastructure. As described above, the Project leverages Frontier’s existing infrastructure and, thus, will be less expensive to build.
- **Significant contribution to achieving the program goal:**
The proposed Project would make a significant contribution to the CASF program as the area within the San Joaquin Valley Regional Broadband Consortium, a region which is served at 95.8% and falls below the 98% goal set forth in AB 1665.
- **Low-Income Service:** The proposed Project area is primarily defined as a low-income community with median household incomes ranging from \$0 - \$52,500 all of which, except two households, fall below the CARE standard of \$52,400 as required by this Decision.
 - ✓ *Low-Income Plan:* Frontier features a choice of two low-income programs for customers: Frontier Fundamental and Frontier Affordable Broadband. The Frontier Affordable Broadband product requires customers to be enrolled in Lifeline telephone service. Alternatively, the Frontier Fundamental product is a stand-alone low-income broadband program that does not require a customer to purchase telephone service. Both products will provide minimum symmetrical speeds of 50 Mbps.

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

This Project will support the goal of achieving 98% broadband service availability in the San Joaquin Valley Regional Broadband Consortium. Based on latest CPUC broadband availability data (as of December 31, 2018), this consortium is served at 95.8%, with Kern County being served at 96.1%. Frontier is one of the primary service providers in the San Joaquin Valley region, rendering this Project vital in the larger goal of providing service to those on the wrong side of the Digital Divide. The Project lays the necessary groundwork that will enable additional Project build opportunities and will allow Frontier more options as we continue to assess opportunities to connect some of the most remote areas of the San Joaquin Valley region.

The Project will serve Tier 3 fire zone sites, per the Commission’s fire map, expanding availability of faster and more reliable broadband capability to be available to two area fire stations.

Expanding and upgrading Internet service in Kern County will benefit residents and community anchor institutions in areas such as education, healthcare, economic and workforce development, and resiliency, among others. This enhanced Internet access will also allow these counties to better reach and provide services and information to rural residents and businesses, and access tools and resources that can help to optimize internal processes to achieve cost

efficiencies. Additionally, enhanced Internet service capabilities are critical for public safety communications allowing first responders to send and receive critical voice, video and data during emergencies and disasters.

The Project will provide HSI access that is integral in connecting teachers to students, parents and educational resources. Rural teachers and administrators acknowledge connectivity limitations as a primary obstacle to effectively using technology in the classroom. Additionally, students lacking Internet connectivity at home are at a disadvantage when completing assignments that require online access and interaction. As more bandwidth intensive material moves online—such as educational videos, interactive learning tools, and video conferencing tools for teachers—connection speed is quickly becoming a major issue for rural educators. This Project will be important to reduce these barriers through expanded Internet access in Kern County.

The Project would positively impact employment growth, especially in areas with lower population density consistent with the theory that rural remote areas may benefit more from HSI by giving businesses access to regional markets. Additionally, businesses need broadband to access online training and classes to improve their employees’ skills. Rural businesses do not have the budgets to send employees to professional development or are too small to send an employee away from operations. Bringing professional development in-house by enabling HSI access reduces those challenges. Additionally, improved broadband access, speed and capacity allows businesses to expand their markets, diversify their funding streams and increase their workforce.

Farmers and ranchers will also benefit from HSI service as it provides innovative technological tools use to maintain greater control over crop and livestock production, processing, distribution, and storage resulting in greater efficiencies, lower prices, safer growing conditions, safer foods and reduced environmental and ecological impact.

Rural healthcare facilities and rural residents seeking healthcare services will greatly benefit from this Project, as the healthcare sector is emerging as a heavy user of Internet services. The evidence is strong for technologies that lower costs, connect remote populations, and expand the reach of urban-centered medical expertise. Furthermore, telehealth can connect physicians with physicians and patients with physicians and provide access to specialists for treatment of multiple conditions.

The application of Frontier for the Lake Isabella and Weldon Project is a modest funding request for a region of the state that is severely unserved and underserved, and therefore is a prudent use of funds to help close the Digital Divide.

Assemblyman Devon J. Mathis supports full funding of the Project for expanding digital access to rural Kern County.

In addition to preparing this application for the CASF Infrastructure Grant Account pursuant to the existing rules and regulations, we have worked with the Regional Consortium to identify anchor institutions within proximity of the fiber middle-mile backhaul deployment that would benefit from connectivity to the new network. If the Legislature and Administration authorize additional CASF support to expand the opportunity for critical broadband expansion beyond last mile deployment, Frontier stands ready to work with qualified anchor institutions to support higher-speed Internet service.

This grant application creates important potential opportunities for anchor institutions help advance broadband in low-income, underserved communities along the path of deployment by supporting distance learning and telehealth-telemedicine, both in response to COVID-19 and to build for the future to secure “Broadband for All.”

Census Blocks Covered

60290052012017	60290052012025	60290052012041
60290052012021	60290052012029	60290052012042
60290052012023	60290052012035	60290052012043
60290052012024	60290052012037	60290052012045

60290052012046
60290052012051
60290052012056
60290052012058
60290052012062
60290052012065
60290052012066
60290052012068
60290052012073
60290052012078
60290052012080
60290052012088
60290052012089

60290052012093
60290052012095
60290052012097
60290052012258
60290052012263
60290052012265
60290052012267
60290052016000
60290052016011
60290052031057
60290052033018
60290052033024
60290052033031

60290052033033
60290052041082
60290052042015
60290052042022
60290052042038
60290052042089
60290052045023
60290052045024
60290052045038
60290052045040
60290052045042

ZIP Codes Covered

93255
93238
93283
93240
93518

Area Map

